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ABSTRACT

The Adult Basic Education Program at Umgeni Water, a water authority in South Africa, is a workplace literacy program that seeks to impart skills within the workplace that can be used in community development, benefitting both the business and community involved. From a pilot project in 1989, the adult education program at Umgeni Water has grown into a holistic development program targeted at the 540 employees assessed to be below a level of functional literacy (42 percent of the work force). At present, 342 learners are in the program, organized into 21 classes at 11 sites. Learners attend classes for 4 hours per week during work time. The program is run by a team of six facilitators experienced in adult education. In 3 years, the program has increased the functional literacy rate among the target group by 12 percent. The program takes a consultative approach, encouraging input from all stakeholders. Learning is experiential and relevant to the life experiences of adults. The learning the adults acquire at work empowers them to participate in community development efforts that benefit themselves as well as the wider community. (KC)

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INTEGRATING INDUSTRY RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to present a vision for the co-operation of Industry and Communities in the provision of Adult Basic Education and Training.

This paper aims to present experiences gained within a workplace literacy program, and explore how these can be utilized in community development, to the benefit of both the Industry and Community involved.

The level of illiteracy within South Africa is estimated at 29 percent. Much of this illiterate population live in rural communities.

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Umgeni Water is the second largest Water Authority in the Republic of South Africa, whose responsibility is the provision of bulk water to an area of 24 000 square kilometers (9 266 square miles). Umgeni Water's Rural Areas Water and Sanitation Plan (RAWSP) is concerned with the provision of potable water to rural communities by the year 2005.

It is the experience of RAWSP that its goal of empowering communities to manage their own water schemes, is being hampered by a lack of basic literacy and managerial skills within the community water committees.

For the past few years, the Human Resources division of Umgeni Water has provided an increasingly successful Adult Basic Education program for its workforce, 42 percent of whom are below the level of functional literacy. The goal of the program is to help those interested obtain a level of functional literacy by the end of 1998. The program runs on a continuum from Mother Tongue literacy (Zulu) to a functional level of English literacy, with classes scheduled for four hours a week during business hours. Content revolves around literacy, numeracy, work and life skills.

From this program has emerged a team of highly experienced facilitators, materials relevant to adults, a knowledge of water provision, a sound infrastructure, and a history of consultative implementation.

The vision of the Umgeni Water ABE Department is to use its accumulated strengths and experiences to provide development support services for RAWSP. Plans are being developed to utilize the developmental skills gained, to provide literacy, numeracy, management and life skills, to those rural water committees and communities with whom RAWSP is involved.

Through this vision the resources developed within Industry will be used to empower communities, to the benefit of both parties.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to present the experiences and strengths of a workplace literacy program, namely, the Adult Basic Education Program at Umgeni Water, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It will be shown how such experiences and strengths can be utilized in community development, to the benefit of both the industry and community involved.

The extent of the problem of illiteracy in South Africa will be outlined, in particular, the challenge facing KwaZulu-Natal and its rural areas. Background on Umgeni Water will be given, as well as its contact with rural communities via rural water and sanitation provision. Problems experienced in scheme implementation and maintenance owing to a lack of basic literacy skills within rural communities will be highlighted. Within this context, the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program within Umgeni Water will be discussed, highlighting its strengths and experiences. It will be argued that skills gained from an internal ABE program can be used to develop communities with whom Umgeni Water works, in order to empower them to manage and maintain water and sanitation schemes, and thus benefit all parties involved. Experience gained from a pilot project run with the Vulindlela Executive Water Committee validates this argument.

THE PROBLEM OF ILLITERACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

"Functional literacy" can be defined as the ability to read, write and speak with understanding, at a level that enables one to participate effectively in the community and the workplace. Functional literacy is broadly equivalent to eight years of formal schooling. In South Africa, 11 145 084 people over the age of fifteen, or 29 percent of the population, are estimated to be below a level of functional literacy. 18 percent of the population of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, or 1 546 000 people over the age of eighteen, have less than seven years of schooling (Harley, Aitchison and Lyster 1996:22-38). At Umgeni Water, the case study in question, 540 employees have been assessed to be below a level of functional literacy. This is 42 percent of the workforce. To ensure participative citizenship amongst all South Africans,

the provision of adult basic education emerges as a significant challenge.

A CASE STUDY: UMGENI WATER

The organization

Established in 1974, Umgeni Water is the second largest water authority in South Africa. A statutory body, Umgeni Water is involved in a broad range of water services, but its core business is the bulk storage, treatment and supply of water to towns and cities in its area of supply. Its responsibility is to manage and provide sufficient, safe and affordable water to the communities in its region, according to their needs. It is also responsible for waste-water treatment and lately, reticulation of treated water to rural and peri-urban communities. Umgeni Water supplies potable water to approximately two and a half million consumers. It has 1 300 employees and a 24 000 square kilometer area of supply (9 266 square miles).

Involvement with communities - The Rural Areas Water and Sanitation Plan (RAWSP)

Traditionally, Umgeni Water centered around water provision to urban areas. In 1994 its area of supply was extended to include vast rural areas with no water and sanitation infrastructure, characterized by rugged topography and dispersed settlements. The additional three and a half million people living within these areas had to make do with whatever water source was available to them, such as local springs and rivers. Health problems as a result of waterborne diseases were endemic, and people spent many hours a day in the simple process of collecting water.

In reply to this need, Umgeni Water developed Water Plan 2025, a strategy to supply potable water to all in established areas by 2005. A Rural Areas Water and Sanitation Plan (RAWSP), was designed to systematically address the needs of those people living in Umgeni Water's area of supply who still lacked basic facilities. Through RAWSP, Umgeni Water became increasingly involved in aspects such as water reticulation and sewage purification. RAWSP installs water schemes in rural and informal areas, which provide inhabitants with access to potable water via standpipes, water shops or individual connections. Capital is provided by Umgeni Water. Elected community water committees maintain the projects and recover the operating costs from the respective communities. To date 400 000 people in rural areas have been supplied with safe water through forty different projects.

Problems experienced with community involvement

Requirements for community water projects laid out by the South African government's Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), rest on the principle of community empowerment. A project must be community driven in order for the community to accept responsibility for it. Communities must participate at all levels of decision making, and ultimately take responsibility for the operation, maintenance and payment of schemes. To ensure effective empowerment, the RDP recommends capacity development and training in areas such as basic principles of business and construction management, scheme maintenance, operation and administration.

Much of what Umgeni Water has planned and implemented is in line with the RDP. From the start Umgeni Water recognized the importance of community involvement. When the first Rural Planning Officers (RPOs) were appointed to implement the plan, they went into the areas with the goal of first gaining commitment from the people. For, without their commitment, there could be no sustainable water supply. To date the RPOs continue to work closely with the communities, guiding them in appointing their local water committees.

Umgeni Water's experience with rural water schemes, however, collaborates the view that effective training and development of key individuals within the community is essential, if water schemes that have been implemented, are to be effectively maintained. Illiteracy levels in rural areas are high. Umgeni Water has found that even if community water committees are not necessarily illiterate, they lack the technical and managerial skills and confidence to effectively

maintain water projects once Umgeni Water has implemented a project and withdrawn. Yet the effectiveness of the community water committees is vital for the success of the process. The challenge is to empower communities for effective project ownership. An education foundation is needed for skills training. Elected community water committees do not want to simply rubber stamp decisions and are eager for training and development in all issues related to project management. A major challenge facing RAWSP is therefore of a social rather than a technical nature. Umgeni Water has found that it can not simply supply the technological aspects of a project and then walk away and expect it to succeed. The capacity of communities needs to be developed if the technological infrastructure is to remain operational and be paid for. However, within the RAWSP division, no trained staff are available to facilitate development and provide capacity training for communities. It was for this reason that the Adult Education department within Umgeni Water was approached.

THE UMGENI WATER ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

Background

Umgeni Water implemented an Adult Basic Education program for several reasons. It saw the upliftment of its employees and the facilitation of self development as part of its social responsibility. The Umgeni Water mission statement states that in return for the "efficient, productive and loyal service" of its employees, it will endeavor to provide them with "opportunities for personal development".

Another reason Umgeni Water implemented ABE was to plan for company growth. In order to be nationally and internationally competitive, a basic education foundation for its workforce needed to be provided. This was the essential foundation for further skills training and career pathing. In addition, ABE was seen as a way to improve in-house communication, increase safety and productivity, and improve company ethos.

Finally, Umgeni Water implemented ABE to keep in line with Government and Union developments. Adult Basic Education was increasingly on the national agenda, and as a progressive company, Umgeni Water saw the need to address this issue internally.

Adult education at Umgeni Water started as pilot project in 1989, with forty learners attending classes at three venues . It has grown into an holistic development program targeted at the 540 employees assessed to be below a level of functional literacy, or 42 percent of the whole workforce. Many of these employees have been previously disadvantaged in terms of educational opportunities. At present 342 learners are in the program, organized into twenty-one classes at eleven different venues. Learners attend classes for four hours a week during work time. The program is run by a team of six facilitators, committed to, trained and experienced in adult education. In a period of three years, the program has increased the functional literacy rate amongst the target group by 12 percent.

The hallmark of the Umgeni Water Adult Education program is its consultative approach. Input from all stakeholders is considered. The program is guided by an Adult Education Policy and a representative Adult Education Forum comprised of learners, shop stewards, management, line management and Human Resources. It is the responsibility of this forum to formulate ABE policy; monitor and evaluate progress; and report back to the respective constituencies.

The ABE policy spells out the purpose of the Adult Education Program, which is to provide literacy and numeracy development courses to meet the training and development needs of Umgeni Water employees. The target set by the policy is to develop all interested employees to a level of functional literacy by the end of 1998. The policy prioritizes employees who can not read and write at all; those who need literacy training for their jobs; and those with potential for promotion.

The suppliers of Umgeni Water's literacy program are Basic Education and Skills for Adults (BESA). ABE at Umgeni Water is learner centered and paced. It is relevant to daily life and appropriate to adults. It recognizes that adults come to classes with a wealth of life experiences and prior learning. It is competency based, ensuring that learners can perform learning outcomes expected. Learning is active and experiential, with learners role-playing real life situations. The

teacher is a guide and facilitator, rather than a lecturer. Language skills stressed are speaking, reading, writing, and listening or understanding. Learning centers around literacy, numeracy and life skills. The primary aim is to communicate in the target language, keeping in mind that one uses language in the interpersonal, informational and esthetic spheres. Lesson content revolves around life skills and situations in which the student will need to use English in the South African work and community environment.

Adult Education at Umgeni Water is arranged along a continuum of language learning, through which learners progress. Learners are screened and placed in the appropriate level. 80 percent attendance and competence is required before a learner can progress to a higher level. Five different courses form a continuum of language development. At present 22 percent of Umgeni Water learners are in Zulu Literacy classes, in which they learn to read and write in their Mother Tongue. 38 percent are in Survival (beginner) English. Here people learn to answer "WH" questions, provide personal information, give directions and time, understand signs, greet appropriately, and complete forms. A further 25 percent are in Conversational (intermediate) English classes, where they learn to sustain basic conversation, identify and name objects, read basic materials, pose questions, provide written directions, and write simple reports. Learners are considered functionally literate once they have completed this course. 15 percent of learners are at the Operational (advanced) English level, where they learn to extract information from manuals, write letters and reports, write simple instructions, give simple talks, contribute to meetings and discussions, and elicit key information. Umgeni Water also offers a Zulu course for English First Language speakers.

Adult Education at Umgeni Water is in line with national Independent Examinations Board (IEB) standards. The Independent Examinations Board links in with recent developments to establish a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to standardize formal and non-formal education and training accreditation throughout South Africa. The hallmark of the IEB approach is its emphasis on "competencies" and "skills", focusing around reading, writing, speaking and listening. This approach has been adopted by Umgeni Water. The IEB offers an external benchmark against which Umgeni Water can measure progress.

Strengths and Experiences

The ABE department at Umgeni Water has developed certain generic strengths and experiences which lend themselves to broader training initiatives. Successful results have been achieved. Functional literacy amongst the target group has increased from 3 percent in 1993 to 15 percent in 1996. An 86 percent provisional pass rate was obtained for English level III candidates (functional literacy) in the national Independent Examinations Board examinations in November 1995. The department has developed a team of highly experienced and trained facilitators. It has a knowledge of materials and methods relevant to adult learning. It has experience in consultative implementation. It has a sound and flexible infrastructure. Having worked within the context of a water organization, it has a knowledge of water provision. Finally, the department has an established network of contacts within Umgeni Water and in the field of Adult Basic Education. These strengths and experiences point to the fact that the Adult Education Department at Umgeni Water is ideally situated to provide broad capacity training for communities with whom Umgeni Water comes into contact through its rural water schemes.

INDUSTRY RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The vision

Within Umgeni Water, the realization has been reached that the strengths and experiences of the ABE department can be used to provide a development support service for RAWSP. The vision is for the Adult Education department to facilitate literacy, numeracy, management and life skills training, for rural water committees and communities. Resources developed within Industry will thereby be used to empower communities, to the benefit of all concerned.

The facilitation of skills

Umgeni Water's Adult Education department can offer two broad areas of service with regard to facilitation of skills. Firstly, it can provide basic literacy and numeracy to communities. Such a service covers needs analyses of the target group; literacy level screening and assessment; facilitator provision; local facilitator training; class implementation and monitoring; materials; and customized modules. The second area of service is more specific to water scheme implementation and involves managerial and life skills for community water committees. Developmental support is ongoing through the pre-implementation, implementation and post- implementation phases of a water project. Development focuses around competencies such as committee skills; critical thinking; planning and organizing; problem solving; decision making; team work; communicative ability; using technical and mathematical knowledge; knowledge of water and sanitation; water scheme maintenance and management; budget control and planning; and the transfer of information to the broader community.

Principles for training and development intervention

Community training and development by the Umgeni Water Adult Education department is delivered with certain principles in mind. It is needs based. Umgeni Water does not prescribe what training is to be delivered, but conducts a comprehensive needs analysis with the community or water committee involved to establish training and development requirements. Secondly, training and development delivery is seen as a process, integrated with every stage of the water project. Entry, participation and exit of Umgeni Water training and development personnel is negotiated will community representatives on the water committee. Finally, training and development delivery is guided by the principles of experiential learning and adult learning, whereby existing knowledge, skills and social norms are incorporated and built on. Training is competency based, with clearly defined, measurable outputs.

Vulindlela: A pilot project

The use of Umgeni Water resources to facilitate community development has been piloted with the Vulindlela Executive Water Committee. Vulindlela is a 260 square kilometer (100 square mile) area situated west of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. The area has been targeted as a Presidential project by the South African government's Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). Vulindlela is the largest rural water supply project undertaken by Umgeni Water to date, with a budget of R183 million, or approximately $50 million. With such a large financial investment, it is in Umgeni Water's interests to ensure the long term success of the project. For ongoing maintenance of the scheme, community empowerment is essential. Umgeni Water's ABE department and RAWSP, the rural planning section, therefore co-operated in a series of experiential development workshops with the Vulindlela Executive Water Committee. An initial workshop was held with the Executive Committee to negotiate and legitimate the ABE department's entry into the process, and to elicit and clarify the training and development needs of the Committee. Based on these, workshops were developed around the following issues: the identification of role players in the Vulindlela project and the definition of respective responsibilities; the identification and definition of outputs expected from the Executive Committee and other structures; the definition of relationships between structures; the clarification of rules, levels of authority and mandates to govern the functions and activities of role players; and the development of systems and structures to give legitimacy to the Committee. This involved taking the Committee through the procedure of drawing up their own constitution. At the time of going to press, further needs-based workshops have been scheduled around the clarification of the relationship between water needs and sanitation needs, and other services; the development of systems and procedures for the community to take ownership of the water project; and the development of a community education and marketing program.

CONCLUSION: A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

The use of internal Umgeni Water training and development resources, namely, its ABE department, in the facilitation of external community development, is beneficial to both parties. For Umgeni Water, the investment of resources into communities improves relations and therefore ensures community co-operation in water scheme implementation. The maintenance of rural water and sanitation schemes is ensured through the empowerment of communities. Thus Umgeni

Water can secure a return for its financial investment. For the community, benefits lie in an increase in basic educational standards and the empowerment of water committees through skills development. Thus community ownership of its rural water and sanitation scheme is secured. A case study of Umgeni Water provides a vision of the employment of Industry resources for community development, to the benefit of all parties concerned.

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